

# 2021 Florida Forever Five-Year Plan

## ***Panther Glades***

Summary of Recommendations and Status  
as of  
December 2020



Division of State Lands  
Florida Department of Environmental Protection



## Panther Glades

Critical Natural Lands Project

Hendry

### Project-at-a-Glance

Year Added to Priority List	2001
Project Acres	64,810
Acquired Acres	25,427
Cost of Acquired Acres	\$40,564,708
Remaining Project Acres	39,383
2019 Assessed Value of Remaining Acres	\$166,944,235

### Purpose for State Acquisition

The Panther Glades project is important to many wildlife species, particularly the Florida panther and the Florida black bear that require extensive areas of habitat to maintain viable populations. This project forms a connection between Devils' Garden, Half Circle L Ranch, and Save Our Everglades Florida Forever projects with the Okaloacoochee Slough State Forest and the Big Cypress National Preserve. This large landscape and watershed in south-central Hendry County would provide important habitat for many species including the Eastern indigo snake, bald eagle, and Florida sandhill crane.

### Manager(s)

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) is recommended as the manager. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Forest Service/FFS is recommended as a cooperating agency.

### General Description

Located in south-central Hendry County approximately 25 miles southeast of Clewiston and 46 miles northeast of Naples, the project is a mosaic of forested uplands interspersed among forested wetland communities. Ranging approximately 19 miles north to south and nine miles



east to west. The far west southern boundary shares one mile with a part of Save Our Everglades project site and the eastern third of the south boundary borders the Big Cypress National Preserve.

#### FNAI Element Occurrence Summary

<u>FNAI Elements</u>	<u>Score</u>
Florida panther	G5T1/S1
Florida black bear	G5T4/S4
Swallow-tailed kite	G5/S2
Florida sandhill crane	G5T2/S2
<i>redmargin zephyrlily</i>	G2G3/S2S3
<i>hand fern</i>	G4/S2
Wood stork	G4/S2
Florida burrowing owl	G4T3/S3
Crested caracara	G5/S2
<i>banded wild-pine</i>	G5/S3
Bald eagle	G5/S3
Glossy ibis	G5/S3

*15 rare species are associated with the project*

#### Public Use

The Panther Glades proposal encompasses a wide range of natural resources. A majority of owners wish to sell conservation easements, but a few wish to sell fee title. Less-than-fee acquisition areas may have no, or at best very limited, public recreation depending on whether public access is allowed. However, fee acquisition areas have the potential for varied natural resource recreation. For fee areas, environmental education and potentially ecosystem tourism tied in with nearby public lands may be accommodated. Ecosystem tourism may be appealing to landowners willing to consider conservation easements. Cabins may be appropriate in both cases, particularly if overnight accommodations are to be a part of environmental and ecosystem tourism programs. Further study will need to be accomplished to determine the desirability of cultural resource interpretation.

#### Acquisition Planning

##### *2001*

On January 25, 2001, the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC) added the Panther Glades project to Group A of the Florida Forever (FF) 2001 Priority list. This fee-simple and less-than-fee acquisition, sponsored by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), consisted of approximately 21,223 acres, multiple owners, and a 2000 taxable value of \$3,947,680. The essential parcels



were identified as McDaniel, Jolly, Giddens, Roberts, and the O R Ranch ownerships in the central and eastern portion of the proposal.

On July 12, 2001, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 20,895-acre addition (aka Dinner Island) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by TNC, consisted of one owner, Hilliard Bros. of Florida LTD, and a 2000 taxable value of \$5,364,370.

### *2002*

On December 5, 2002, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 3,860-acre addition (aka Barfield Tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the TNC, consisted of one owner, James Barfield, and a 2002 taxable value of \$3,098,640. On April 18, 2003, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 1,615-acre addition to the project boundary. Sponsored by the ARC Vice Chair Jack Moller, it consisted of one owner, STOF Holding LTD, and a 2003 taxable value of \$1,550,990. The addition was a transfer of acreage from the Save Our Everglades FF project into this project.

### *2003*

On June 6, 2003, the ARC approved a fee-simple, 3,711-acre addition (aka Crow's Nest Tract) to the project boundary. It was sponsored by the landowner, Robert J. Underbrink, and had a 2002 taxable value of \$8,630,020.

### *2007*

On December 14, 2007, ARC voted to move the Panther Glades project to Group B list of the FF priority list.

### *2008*

On December 12, 2008, ARC voted to extend the boundary of Panther Glades by adding a less-than-fee 4,208-acre parcel (the McDaniels Ranch Reserve) with a tax value of \$20,456,810. This proposal was submitted as a stand-alone project and designated as essential.

### *2009*

On June 12, 2009 ARC voted to add 4,694 acres, with a tax value of \$12,300,000, consisting of the Kissimmee Billy Strand project (full fee), including the Green Glades/Bergeron (less-than-fee) property, to this Panther Glades project. This proposal was initially submitted as a stand-alone project, the lands were designated as essential, ARC added it to the Florida Forever list, then approved amending the acreage into the Panther Glades boundary.

### *2011*

On December 9, 2011, ARC placed this project in the Critical Natural Lands list of projects.



## Coordination

TNC is considered an acquisition partner. Efforts will be made to coordinate state and local governmental agencies including the FFS, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) in management of the property.

## Management Policy Statement

The principal purposes of the project are to protect significant natural habitat important to the Florida panther, Big Cypress black bear, Florida black bear, swallow-tailed kite, multiple wading birds (including wood stork, white ibis, little blue heron, tricolored heron, snowy egret, and great egret) and numerous other rare species, as well as to preserve the hydrological connection with protected lands to the south.

## Management Prospectus

Priority will be given to the conservation and protection of environmentally unique native habitats and threatened and endangered species. Management programs will be designed to conserve, protect, manage and/or restore important ecosystems, landscapes, forests, and water resources. The tract will also be managed to provide opportunities for hunting, camping, hiking, environmental and cultural resource education, and other natural resource-based recreational activities. Since the principal purposes of the project are to protect habitat for the Florida panther and other species of concern, management goals will be oriented to conservation and protection of these species and to public use that is carefully controlled.

### *Qualifications for state designation*

The Panther Glades project has the resource diversity to qualify as a wildlife and environmental area.

### *Manager*

FWC is recommended as the manager. FFS is recommended as a cooperating agency.

### *Conditions affecting intensity of management*

Some portions of the project include lands that are low-need tracts, requiring basic resource management including the frequent use of prescribed fire where appropriate. A significant portion of the uplands have been developed for agriculture or other purposes; therefore, restoration activities are contemplated for some of the acreage. The primary management needed for perpetuation of the less disturbed natural communities would involve the introduction of prescribed fire and control of human access. Biotic surveys should be a priority,

since there are potentially many taxa of rare or listed species. Development of facilities would be kept to the minimum level necessary to assure a high-quality recreational experience, and any such development would be confined to areas of previous disturbance. Restoration activities would focus around reforestation of pasturelands and hydrological restoration following a full assessment of the necessity for such activities. Invasive non-indigenous species can likely be controlled if control activities are implemented hastily.

*Timetable for implementing management and provisions for security and protection of infrastructure*

During the first year after acquisition, emphasis will be placed on site security, posting boundaries, public access, fire management, resource inventory, exotic species control, and removal of refuse. A management plan will be developed by the FWC describing the management goals and specific objectives necessary to implement future resource management. The management plan will also establish future roles of cooperating entities including governmental agencies and other stakeholders.

Longer-range plans will stress ecosystem management and the protection and management of threatened and endangered species. Following completion of plant community inventory and historic vegetation analysis, quantified vegetation management objectives would be developed pursuant to the FWC objective-based vegetation management process. Additionally, the Wildlife Conservation Prioritization and Recovery program of FWC would provide assessment, recovery, and planning support for project and to enhance management of focal species and recovery of listed species. An all-season prescribed burning management plan will be developed and implemented using conventional and biologically acceptable guidelines. Management activities will strive to manage natural plant communities to benefit native wildlife resources. Programs providing multiple recreational uses will also be implemented.

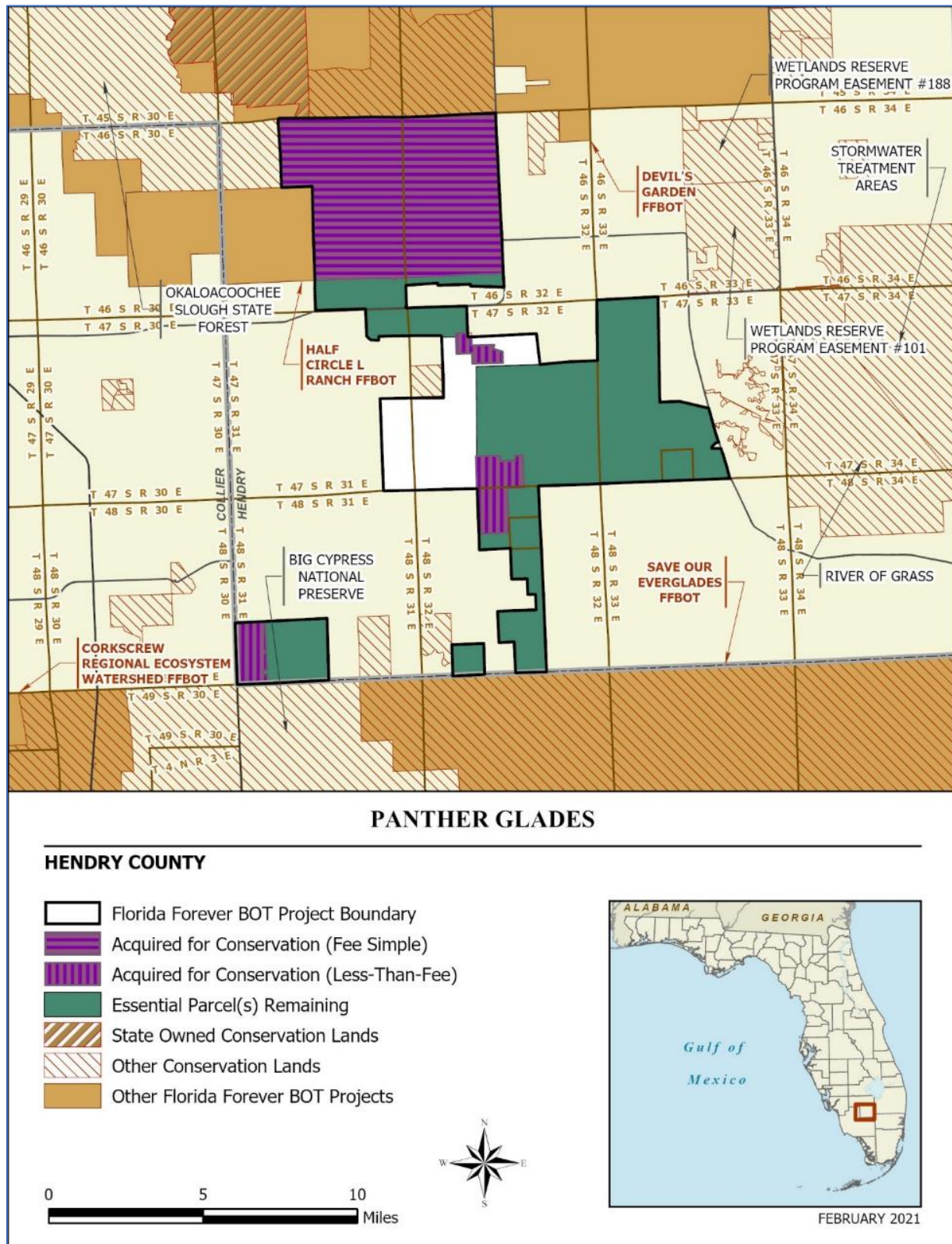
Environmentally sensitive areas will be identified, and appropriate protective measures will be implemented on those areas. Unnecessary roads, fire lanes and hydrological disturbances will be abandoned or restored as practical. Minimal infrastructure development will be required to allow public access, provide facilities for the public, and provide security and management of the property.

Archaeological and historic sites would be managed in coordination with the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources (DHR). FWC should cooperate with other state and local governmental agencies including FFS, DEP, and SFWMD in management of the property.

### *Revenue-generating potential*

The revenue generating potential is not known and will depend upon future uses to be approved in the management plan. Since very little of the project is currently appropriate for forest products production, future revenue from timber resources will depend on successful reforestation and management of the restored pasturelands and other disturbed areas. If managers' assessments indicate it would be appropriate, some revenues might be generated from grazing leases in flatwoods or pastured areas not restored in the interest of habitat diversity or due to lack of funding. Additional revenue would be generated from sales of hunting licenses, fishing licenses, wildlife management area permits, and other special hunting permits and user fees. Some revenues might be realized in the future from recreational user fees and ecotourism activities, if such projects can be economically developed. Long-term value of ecosystem services to local and regional land and water resources, and to human health, are expected to be significant if the Legislature appropriates funds for land management.





Map 1 : FNAI, January 2021